

THE KINGDOM OF RUANDA

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suffer is not only to be hurt but also to expiate one's sins, to purify one's soul, and to identify oneself with Christ. For serious Christians, suffering cannot be stripped of its religious meaning without being completely distorted. Banyarwanda, on the contrary, seem to take a very 'secular' view of the human condition. Their belief in the supernatural world does not greatly influence their attitude to the unavoidable hardships and pleasures of life. All our informants agree that to die means above all to quit life. They believe that they will become *bazimu* but that leaves them rather indifferent. Even initiates do not show any enthusiasm for the idea of joining *Ryangaombe* and his *imandwa* at their feasts. To abandon his children, his herds, his friends, is a sad thing for a Mututsi. But it is accepted, without dramatizing it, as one of those facts which belong to the normal order of things. 000 761

If quitting this life is so unfortunate, is human existence such a cheerful experience for Banyarwanda? Enjoyments and the pleasant things of life are very unevenly distributed in Ruanda. The superior caste, the Batutsi, form about 10 per cent. of the population. But, by various means, principally by the institutionalized exchange of cattle for services and dues, Batutsi have been able to gather a much higher proportion of consumers' goods. They do no manual work and have leisure to cultivate eloquence, poetry, refined manners, and the subtle art of being witty when talking and drinking hydromel with friends. Bahutu, perhaps 85 per cent. of the population, do not enjoy such gracious living. They have to produce for themselves and for Batutsi. On a very poor soil, with technologically primitive implements, it is necessary to work hard to secure the surplus production required by the Batutsi. Moreover, the great social influence of Batutsi has given opportunities for the arbitrary exercise of power, so that there are many insecurities in a Muhutu's life. But exploitation has been kept within limits set by the wisdom and the interests of the Batutsi, and a system of protection has assured a minimum of security to the Bahutu. As to the Batwa, they are so low in the social hierarchy, and are considered so irresponsible that they have had a greater independence of action. Formerly they lived on the margin of Ruanda society. They had a reputation for grossly enjoying any opportunities for eating, drinking, making music, and dancing. It should be added that Banyarwanda, according to our standards, have been rather defenceless against disease, that starvation was a real threat for the majority when the rains failed, that ritual observances and interdicts were numerous, and that when somebody happened to be involved in a charge of sorcery he had good reason for great fear. Thus it seems that, for an ordinary Munyarwanda, life is objectively hard, often dangerous but bearable. This partly explains the Ruanda outlook upon the totality of life. It might be described as a mild optimism. As many of our informants put it: 'Existence for Banyarwanda was not easy, it was even often very painful, but on the whole, life was rather a good thing.' 564 181 511

As everywhere, some individuals were at some time of their lives plunged into circumstances which offered apparently no way out. A Mututsi who 154

154 had incurred the king's displeasure and was for that reason left without protectors, friends, or cattle was in a desperate situation; only with difficulty could he gain a bare subsistence. A Muhutu against whom an accusation of sorcery was repeated; an unmarried girl of a noble family whose pregnancy became publicly known; all these, if they failed to escape from their predicament by skill and rational behaviour (such as obtaining the king's mercy, denying the charge of sorcery and looking for the protection of a powerful man, using abortifacients or denying the pregnancy), would have recourse to the *bapfumu*, seeking to know what spirit or sorcerer was responsible for their misfortune and how to appease the malevolent being. If all the practices and offerings recommended by the diviner had no effect, then they called upon *Imana*, and if their prayers were unanswered, only drastic solutions remained, such as exile in a foreign country or suicide. But these tragic destinies were not numerous and they did not shake the belief of the majority in the moderate happiness of living.

812 There is a further reason for their generally cheerful acceptance of the conditions of their existence. Banyarwanda are not inclined to speculate about the inaccessible. Westerners are given to imagining how beautiful and good life might be if humanity and the universe were different from what they are. This trend of thinking is quite alien to Banyarwanda and, when it is suggested, appears futile to them. The usual, the normal (in the sense of what we are accustomed to, and what we have reason to expect) is often self-explanatory. When a particular event fits into the normal scheme of things, there are no questions to be asked. If everybody has to relinquish this existence and die, death is no scandal or absurdity. It is the way *Imana* has arranged things. There is no further problem.

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Cultural Values

181 Human action is determined partly by cultural values, partly by the socially recognized means of attaining them. By cultural values we mean the final or intermediate aims that are considered the proper purposes of human activity in a particular society.

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564 In a stratified society, such as that of Ruanda, each layer is likely to have its own set of values, although some of those originating in one group may extend to others. Let us begin with the Batutsi. When a Mututsi informant is asked what the people of his group wish for above all, the answer comes immediately: 'children and cattle.' A further question, 'why?', discloses that these are not ultimate values sought for themselves, but intermediate ones, means to reach more abstract ends. The latter are power (*amaboko*) and reputation (*ugukomera*).

Power is understood here in connexion with persons (power over somebody) rather than with things (power to do something). It is, to paraphrase Lasswell's definition, the ability that a person, engaged in a human relationship with another, has to oblige the latter to do or not to do something (on pain of suffering severe privation). Power is essentially the capacity to

26 THE PREMISE OF INEQUALITY IN RUANDA

152 Twa, as people living an active and dangerous life, and regarded
626 as almost sub-human, had little to fear except being deprived of
829 food by their master's whim.
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All these dangers were real enough and no behaviour could ensure complete immunity. But most people appear to have felt that with some skill and right conduct they were avoidable and consequently did not constitute oppressive threats. Frustrations entailed by starvation and Tutsi requirements were regarded in pre-European days as part of an immutable natural and social order. Ruanda men and women were not inclined to speculate on the impossible, and any order of things other than that they knew belonged definitely for them to the sphere of the impossible. We shall see later on that a deep belief in the fundamental inequality of men had pervaded the ethos of the whole society, and had helped a great deal in the acceptance of frustrating conditions. Consequently these have not led to the usual feeling of aggressiveness or resentment.

176 Let us now turn to the invisible world as the Ruanda conceived it.²² Although it was dominated by Imana, a god essentially powerful and good, it was a disquietening world. Indeed the spirits of the dead (*bazimu*), whatever their temper when they were in this world, were thought of as bad. The direct ascendants of the father's and mother's lines were usually protective if their living descendants had observed the proper filial behaviour, if they had not neglected prohibitions and avoidances, and if they had not forgotten offerings. But all other *bazimu* belonging to the same patrilineage were always harmful. *Bazimu* of other lineages were less dangerous unless there were feuds between the particular kin groups concerned. Among the spirits of the dead, a small clique, called the *imandwa*, was particularly powerful and might be helpful to those who had been initiated into the sect of Ryangombe, their chief.²³ Apart from these exceptions, ghosts were essentially malevolent towards living people. At best they did not harm. Of the two categories of men who had special relations with the invisible world, diviners and sorcerers, the latter were definitely considered to be criminals who either used poison (or other deadly substances as for instance when they mixed in food a powder made from the lungs of a person who had died from tuberculosis), or magical

²² Maquet, 1958, pp. 526-30; Pauwels, 1958.

²³ See photographs in Maquet, 1957.